

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1355

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

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TAGS: PGOV, PINR, PINT

SUBJ: ASAD RESHUFFLES CABINET

1. SUMMARY. ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1974, PRESIDENT ASAD ANNOUNCED CHANGES IN THE SYRIAN CABINET. SEVEN NEW MINISTERS WERE ADDED; SIX FORMER MINISTERS LOST THEIR PORTFOLIOS; TWO MINISTRIES WERE ABOLISHED WHILE THREE WERE ADDED. MOST COMMENT TO DATE POINTS OUT HOW LITTLE IMPORTANCE CHANGE IN FACT HAS. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER MONTHS OF RUMOR AND EXPECTATIONS OF A CABINET
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CHANGE, PRESIDENT ASAD ANNOUNCED ON SEPTEMBER 1 SEVERAL MINOR

CHANGES IN SYRIAN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. THESE CHANGES DID NOT AFFECT THE MOST IMPORTANT PORTFOLIOS, I.E., DEFENSE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, OR INTERIOR. THERE ARE THREE NEW MINISTRIES. FORMER MINISTRY OF OIL, ELECTRICITY, AND NATURAL RESOURCES WAS DIVIDED INTO MINISTRY OF ELECTRICITY AND MINISTRY OF OIL AND NATURAL RESOURCES. FORMER MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AND RUAL AFFAIRS HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A NEW MINISTRY OF HOUSING (FORMER MINISTER ABDULBAKI HAS NEW HOUSING PORTFOLIO). THE MINISTRY FOR ADVANCED VILLAGES (THOSE NEAR FRONT LINE) WAS ALSO ABOLISHED. SEVEN NEW MINISTERS AND PORTFOLIOS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. SUBHI KAHLEH, MINISTER OF EUPHRATES DAM-- FORMERLY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EUPHRATES DAM PROJECT WHO REPORTEDLY HELD NUMBER OF MINISTERIAL POSTS DURING EARLY 1960S; SUNNI FROM DAMASCUS.

B. ADNAN MUSTAFA, MINISTER OF OIL AND NATURAL RESOURCES--PROFESSOR IN FACULTY OF PHYSICS, DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY.

C. NU'MAN AL-ZEIN, MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION-- PREVIOUSLY HEAD OF LATAKIA PORT AUTHORITY; SUNNI.

D. HANI AL-SAWWAF, MINISTER OF ELECTRICITY-- FORMERLY ASSISTANT MINISTER OF OIL INDUSTRIES, ELECTRICITY, AND MINERAL RESOURCES; SAID TO BE QUITE COMPETENT; RUMORED TO BE MEMBER OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD; SUNNI FROM DAMASCUS.

E. MOHAMAD AL-SHARIF, MINISTER OF FINANCE -- FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SYRIAN CUSTOMS; GRADUATE OF DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY; ALAWITE FROM LATAKIA; RUMORED TO HAVE FAMILY RELATIONS TO PRESIDENT ASAD.

F. AHMAD ISKANDAR AHMAD, MINISTER OF INFORMATION-- FOR PAST FIVE YEARS CHIEF EDITOR OF GOVERNMENT DAILY AL-THAWRA; ALAWITE FROM LATAKIA.

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G. MURSIL ABU-OMAR, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRARIAN REFORM -- FORMERLY DIRECTOR OF AGRARIAN REFORM IN MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE; ONE TIME HEAD OF STATE-RUN AGRICULTURE BANK; DRUZE FROM SUWEIDA.

3. THE FORMER MINISTERS NOW DROPPED FROM CABINET ARE AS FOLLOWS: GEORGE SADDIKNI (MINISTER OF INFORMATION), JABR AL-KAFRI (MINISTER OF OIL,

ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL ESOURCES), MUSTAFA HALLAJ (MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING AFFAIRS), ENG. MUNIR WANNUS (MINISTER OF EUPHRATES DAM), AHMAD HASAN AL-AS'AD (MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRARIAN REFORM), AND MUAYYAD JAZZAN (MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ADVANCED VILLAGES).

4. THE NEW 31-MEMBER CABINET HAS SEVENTEEN MEMBERS FROM BAATH PARTY AND FOURTEEN MINISTERS WHO ARE EITHER INDEPENDENTS OR MEMBERS OF OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS WHICH COOPERATE WITH BAATH PARTY IN THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT. POLITICAL GROUPINGS ARE AS FOLLOWS: COMMUNIST -- OMAR SIBA'I (MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS) AND ZABIR ABD AL-SAMID (MINISTER OS STATE); ARAB SOCIALIST UNION -- SUBHI KAHALEH (MINISTER OF CULTURAL AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE) AND ANWAR HAMADEH (MINISTER OF STATE); SOCIALIST UNIONISTS -- ADIB AL-NAHAWI (MINISTER OF JUSTICE), MOHAMAD ALI HASHEM (MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION), AND ABD)-RAZZAK ABD AL-BAKI (NOW MINISTER OF HOUSING); AND ARAB SOCIALISTS -- ABD AL-GHANI KANNUT (MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS). INDEPENDENTS ARE: SUBHI KAHALEH (MINISTER OF EUPHRATES DAM), ABD AL-SATTAR AL-SAYYED (MINISTER OF WAQFS), MADANI AL-KHYAMI (MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH), ABDALLAH AL-KHANI (MINISTER OF TOURISM), HANI AL-SAWWAF (MINISTER OF ELECTRICITY), AND NOURALLAH NOURALLAH (MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING AFFAIRS).

5. COMMENT: THIS CHANGE IN SYRIAN COUCIL OF MINISTERS DOES NOT IN OUR VIEW PORTEND ANY CHANGE IN SYRIAN DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY. NEW CABINET CAN BE DESCRIBED NEITHER AS A WAR-NOR A PEACE-CABINET. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AFTER MONTHS OF RUMORS THAT THERE WOULD BE MAJOR CABINET CHANGE, DAMASCENES APPEAR SURPRISED CHANGES WERE SO MINOR. WE HEAR PREDICTIONS THAT ANY BASIC CHANGE IN CABINET STRUCTURE WILL AWAIT DEVELOPMENTS SURROUNDING FURTHER MOVEMENT ON PEACE SCENE. MURPHY

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